

Henry & Al & J. Edgar

ESSAY

By William Safire

WASHINGTON, Sept. 26—Last year, after learning that I was among 17 Government officials and newsmen who had been illegally wiretapped, I called Al Haig to find out if President Nixon had known about the tap on my line.

"Absolutely not," said General Haig. "The President was shocked to learn about it just now."

That was not true. In testimony released yesterday as part of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's whitewash of the Kissinger-Haig role in wiretapping, Senator Fulbright asked: "So is it correct to conclude that the President personally requested that each of these individuals be tapped?"

Our next NATO commander replied artfully: "...three or four weeks ago the President signed a letter suggesting that he approved them and, therefore, I believe that he did."

Then General Haig added a curious thought about Mr. Nixon's approval of each of these invasions of privacy: "Now, how formally that was done, whether it was done by Mr. Ehrlichman or Mr. Halderman in his behalf, or Dr. Kissinger running it by him, I can't say."

Consider those words, because they reveal a conception of a plural President that is at the root of so much of the Watergate agony. When I recently remonstrated with General Haig for misleading me last year, he replied in the same vein: "You know, Bill, the President is more than one man."

The idea of a hydra-headed President, with accountability diffused and blame unfixable, is the Kissinger-Haig defense against bearing responsibility for fervent sponsorship of an illegal White House spying operation. They were just "following orders" from a President who—in their eyes—was Richard J. Edgar Hoover, sometimes John Mitchell, and now in a sense the individual who had been tapped to the job.

Spring on the disillusion was necessary. Dr. Kissinger explained with the sound of the geyser erupting to Senators Scott and Case, to show the hereness of his own loyalty—after all, Henry had long experience in Washington under Democrats: "I was a friend of both Jack and Robert Kennedy. In 1967 I conducted negotiations with the North Vietnamese for Harriman and Katzenbach. I saw, a great deal of Robert Kennedy before his assassination and, of course, I was a consultant to the President then."

This decade-long record of top level Washington activity had been suddenly

to explain his remark to Director Hoover that Henry and his friends "would destroy whoever did this leaking."

"I was new in Washington," he explained. "I might have had a tendency to show him that I was alert to the danger of security."

Dead men tell no tales. Dr. Kissinger and General Haig have decided, and as expected they have tried to place the largest portion of guilt about the wiretaps at the doorstep of the F.B.I.

In most of the cases, the orders to wiretap had been requested by deputy F.B.I. Director William Sullivan, who said he received surveillance requests from Al Haig. Mr. Hoover would then get written authorization from the Attorney General and the taps went on. But Messrs. Kissinger and Haig now claim that the F.B.I. documents lie, swearing they knew nothing about certain of the taps that were attributed to them.

Whom does that leave holding the bag? J. Edgar Hoover, who was deep-sixed by the grim reaper a while back, and William Sullivan, who insists that General Haig did indeed make the wiretap requests he just denies.

If we are to believe the arguments of the Kissinger-Haig defense, we must believe that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was run with no concern for professionalism, with embarrassing activities left lightly covered by stories that could readily be disavowed, which was not the way J. Edgar Hoover was known to operate.

The conflict in testimony between the Kissinger-Haig defense and the testimony of the living F.B.I. men is absolute. Somebody is committing consistent perjury, and nobody in Government is interested in finding out who's lying.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee investigation was a fiasco, and committee members from the crime that Dr. Kissinger dropped about the other F.B.I. program of wiretapping, not yet revealed.

The special prosecutor's report does not find illegal wiretapping "officially sanctioned and approved by the President." It says, "I think it is fair to say that in the summer of 1971, I was not told the President had approved the wiretaps." General Haig said he had told the special prosecutor I was not his man.

Which is true enough. Al Haig has boasted to colleagues in San Clemente of a \$200,000-a-year offer in the private sector from the Rockefellers. Let him take it.

The past held with honor by Generals Eisenhower, Eisenhower's son, and Norstad should be held by the overy-gold soldier who is the President's